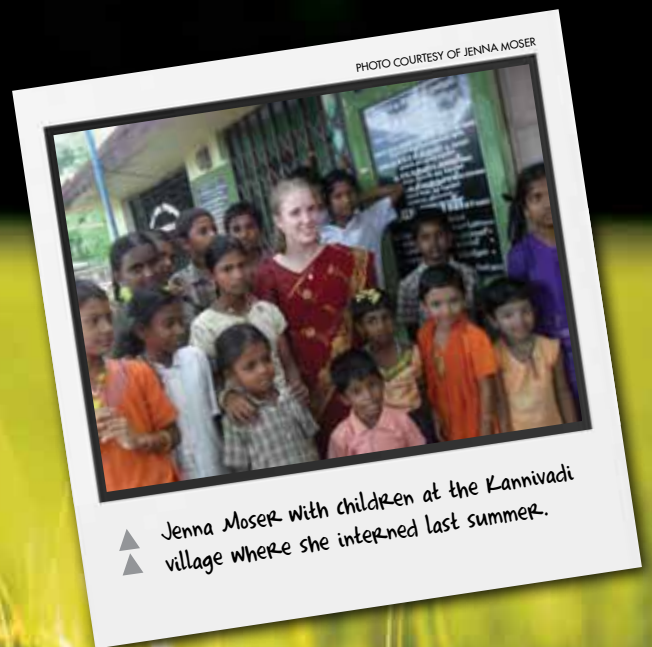


Using Agriculture to Make a



Difference

BY SABRINA KIDWAI

Growing up in Philadelphia, Jenna Moser always wanted to be like her dad, who was a member of FFA and grew up on a farm in western Pennsylvania. She took a big step in emulating her father when she enrolled at the W. B. Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences, located in the upper Roxborough section of Philadelphia, and became a member of FFA herself, going on to serve as president during her senior year. She also participated in 4H, the FFA Chorus and running programs.

While in FFA and 4H, she learned a number of skills, she notes, including public speaking, teamwork and leadership. “By being part of an FFA chapter with 500 members, it takes a lot of communication to ensure things work right,” Moser said. “Because I lived in Philadelphia, I traveled on Saturdays with the 4H club to local farms so we could work with different animals, including cows and sheep. We had to work as a group, and teamwork was important.”

She also learned from being part of 4H and FFA that finding ways to communicate with people effectively helps things run more smoothly—a skill that

she would find very useful when she travelled overseas and found herself immersed in an entirely different culture.

Internship in India

During Moser’s senior year, Jessica McAtamney, her mentor and running coach, suggested that Moser apply for The Norman E. Borlaug-Raun International Agricultural Science and Technology Internship through The World Food Prize. The Borlaug-Raun International Program “helps developing countries strengthen sustainable agricultural practices by providing scientific training and collaborative research opportunities to visiting researchers, policymakers and university faculty,” according to its Web site. The World Food Prize is an organization that fights global hunger and provides high school students with an eight-week-long internship with scientists and policymakers around the world in places like Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America.

“Ms. McAtamney always gives back by helping her students, and she always finds the right opportunities for people. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to travel to India,” Moser said.

Moser dutifully applied for the Norman E. Borlaug-Raun internship, and

“During my experience, I learned about how narrow my perception of agriculture was.”

was one of 16 interns selected as the class of 2010. She spent two months studying under M.S. Swaminathan, an agricultural scientist who developed hybrid rice and is known as the “Indian Father of the Green Revolution.” Her internship was in Chennai, which is located on the southeast coast of India, and she also traveled to Kannivadi and Tamil Nadu for various conferences or work-internship experiences.

“I thought it would be cool to visit another country and see how other farms operated,” Moser said “During my experience, I learned about how narrow my perception of agriculture was.”

During her internship with Swaminathan, she learned about the diversity in agricultural processes, how fortunate we are in the west (the villagers she spent time with had no refrigeration), and about cultural diversity.

“I spent a weekend in a village doing

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my research with the farmers. Not only did I see the livelihood of the people, but each time I visited a family they gave me food. During the weekend, I had four meals with four different families. I learned it was rude not to take the food, but they didn't have refrigeration, but I thought they could save the food for another time."

She continued: "During the same weekend, I was supposed to play a game with the kids, and I only spoke a few words of Tamil. I used body language to communicate with them on how to play 'Duck Duck Goose,' and the communication skills I learned in FFA and 4H came in handy."

Doing Research

During her internship, she interviewed 30 maize farmers and discovered that the majority of them don't use machines, and women perform at least 75 percent of the work.

"One of the men told me that I was really outgoing, which I didn't realize would surprise people," Moser said. "I wasn't afraid to ask questions, and I

had questions about everything. A good leader should always ask questions."

She notes that because of the time spent in India, she is grateful for what she has, and has also learned to be more open to change and trying new things.

"Near the end of my second week in India, people were asking me to wear the bindi (a dot worn on the forehead), which I wasn't comfortable wearing. Although I was hesitant to wear it, I wanted to be more culturally accepting, so I decided to start wearing it during the fourth week of my trip. I learned that there are going to be a lot of things that I may not be comfortable with in life—but that isn't necessarily a bad thing."

The Importance of CTSOs, Internships

CTSOs offer students invaluable learning opportunities that are integral in helping to develop the skills necessary for success in school and in the workplace, Moser said.

"Students should join a Career and Technical Student Organization because it offers them the hands-on skills as well as the life skills you need to succeed. I am a firm believer that you can learn more by doing something rather than reading about it."

Because of her internship experience, she encourages other students to find an internship that interests them; it is a practical way to participate in hands-on learning that helps develop skills that can only be acquired in a real-world context such as the workplace. She adds that there are many internship opportunities that do not involve going overseas, but that are equally rewarding nonetheless.

Moser said, "I don't want students to

compare themselves to my experience in that if they don't get an international internship, then it won't be rewarding. Students need to realize that there are terrific internships everywhere, including inside the United States. By taking part in one, they will have a better understanding of what they want to do and have an incredible time."

A New Perspective, a New Direction

When Moser returned from India, she changed her objective about her future career. She not only wanted to major in agriculture education, but she also wanted to pursue a minor in international agriculture. Moser just completed her freshman year at Penn State University, and upon graduation she plans to join a company that will allow her to travel to other countries to teach agriculture for a couple of years.

"What I noticed in India was that the people involved in agriculture are older, and the younger generation isn't interested in agriculture and doesn't understand how important it is to be involved in it," Moser said. "I would like to teach in developing countries and inspire young people to pursue careers in agriculture. That enthusiasm for agriculture developed because of my experience in FFA." **I**

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